The House of Many Mansions.

A

SERMON

DELIVERED AT THE FUNERAL OF

MRS. JOHN M. PARKER,

AT

The Congregational Church in Hamburg,

NOVEMBER 7, 1859.

BY

REV. E. F. BURR.

PUBLISHED BY REQUEST.

AN OBITUARY NOTICE,

BY

REV. A. S. FRANCIS,

PASTOR OF THE NORFOLK STREET M. E. CHURCH, NEW YORK.

HARTFORD:
STEAM PRESS OF ELIHU GEER, 16 STATE ST.
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SERMON.

In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also.

John xiv: 2, 3.

These words are designed to console the Apostles under the pressure of a severe affliction: and for this purpose describe comprehensively the future Home of the believer and the Relations which Christ sustains to it.

When a man is building at a distance a home for his children, they are greatly interested in thinking what sort of a home it will be. They indulge in conjectures. They ask questions. Of an evening, they gather about the paternal knee and, with uplift faces and rapid breath, beg to know all about the place that is preparing for them. Where is it—what is it like—how will it be furnished—will it be large, beautiful, costly? And the affectionate father is not unwilling to gratify their natural curiosity, under certain reasonable conditions. Some things cannot well be explained to them. Others it were better for them to discover with their own eyes. But as to many things and the general character of their new home, there is no occasion for any reserve whatever, and so no reserve whatever is maintained. The young inquirers are rejoiced to hear of a mansion spacious and fair, rising in a fruitful and sunny land,

embosomed in pleasant lawns and trees and gardens, and filled with means of various enjoyment.

See here the dealing of the Heavenly Father! He is making ready for believers, beyond the grave, a house not made with hands. As yet we cannot go to it. No natural eminence commands it: no optic glass of mere science, however ably plied, can bring the rising structure nigh. And yet we wish to know about it. Some of us perhaps hardly have a wish that is stronger. So our Father in heaven comes to our help, and shows himself as free to impart all possible and profitable information as we are to receive it. Doubtless there are mysteries of celestial architecture and upholstery which cannot yet be made plain to us. Doubtless some questions we might choose to ask had better wait for their answer till the great moving-day, when we shall take possession of the inheritance and turn our faith to sight. But there is much concerning that inheritance which can with advantage be communicated to us now—much that will be useful to attract, to comfort, to stimulate—and so God in Christ comes to us in many Scripture passages as the precious revealer of what eye cannot see, as, in its general character and in certain specified respects, high and glorious enough to overtask the most soaring conceptions.

Among these revealing passages the text stands prominent. In it the Saviour speaks of a *spacious* Home —a House of many Mansions. Behold, all whom it may concern! This is no narrow place where only a few angels and prophets and apostles can be accommodated; but one so wide that there is plenteous room in it for both hosts of angels and hosts of men; not merely such select hosts as no man can number out of every

people and nation and kindred and tongue, but that vastly larger company to whom come the strivings of the Gospel or conscience. Yes, my friends, there is room for you, and room for your children, and room for your friends, and room for your acquaintances far and near—room for all you would care to have with you—in sooth, room for every son and daughter of Adam, past, present and future. And should the whole world, from sunrise to sunset, and from Eden to the last trump, enter the spacious habitation it could still be said, "There yet is room." Its walls would crowd no one of all that mighty multitude.

One day, to be outside this Home will be exposure to the beatings of a pitiless and eternal storm. What a blessed thing, then, that so large a shelter is provided for us and ours—that no father is obliged to feel that there is no place for his children, no wife that there is no place for her husband, no child that there is no place for his parents! What a blessed thing to feel that a scant heaven does not appeal to our selfishness —that in choosing our own safety we are not put upon the harsh necessity of choosing the destruction of others—that when we ourselves are safe in the life-boat, our safety has not been purchased by the exclusion of others whom we have stepped down before out of the sinking ship! When, amid a darkening sky and rising winds and other signs of mortal tempest, a ship sweeps up to the mouth of a harbor, how pleasant a thing to see that, although many distressed flags of all nations have already found refuge within, ample space still remains for itself and every sister ship in the squadron! Thanks to the roomy anchorage, it is not a question which shall be sacrificed, because all can be saved.

So ship after ship rides gratefully into still water, and welcomes with joy each new arrival to the same safety.

You will further observe that, in the account which the text gives of the future Home of the believer, it is described as a home in the *immediate presence of God.* What is "My Father's House," but a place bearing something of the same relation to God that a dwelling on earth does to its occupant—the place where his personal presence specially centers?

You have heard that there is a point in space around which, by virtue of well-known laws, the whole materialism of the universe revolves—all planets and stars and matter of every name. It seems to me a rational idea that this universal center of motion is also the universal center of government, and that a metropolitan world there lifts its sublime domes and pinnacles, and shines and glows as the palace of the King of Kings. But, whatever may be true of this ancient speculation, it is evident from the Scriptures that there is somewhere such a Divine Capital, and equally plain that, wherever in the profound of space that Capital may be, it is the destined home of the believer. For, see you, it is nothing less than the Father's own House he is to occupy! He is to dwell at Court. The very presence itself is to be his mansion. Conceive of no departed Christian friend of yours as Siberianized on some outpost world of the empire, where the far-coming rays of Divine glory shine feebly—look not to find him planted on some Neptune, coldly swinging on the glimmering confines of nature—but ever think of him, and, if you yourself are good, at last find him inhabiting the central Sun itself.

Now I am well aware that to some of you the idea of making your home in the immediate presence of God is unpleasant. It is so with all impenitent sinners. Even the idea of that qualified Divine presence to which men are subjected in this world, is distasteful to such as have not learned to recognize God as a friend; and they put it from them as much as possible. Nor is the case much better with a certain class of Christians. Is it any pleasure to the Christ-reproaching and God-offending backsliders to think of being any nearer to angry Divinity than now? If, however, there is a faithful man among you with love to God in strong exercise, that man will recognize as a bright feature of his future Home that it will be the Father's House. We love to be near those whom we love. Just as a hungry man tends to a feast, or a cold man to the warm sheltered sunshine, so a godly man tends to God. It is his nature—his instinct. And then to be with God in his own pure home is to be perfectly holy —a thing above all others delightful for him to anticipate. Displays of Divine character of most wonderful extent, may also be expected on that day when he shall see face to face: while around these higher revelations will play the glory of such an external magnificence and beauty as make a fair setting for the still fairer jewel, a precious frame for the still more precious painting, a pedestal for the statue only inferior in quality of material and workmanship to the masterpiece of sculpture that stands upon it.

If you look still more critically at the words of Jesus you will see that the future Home of the believer is one which he will occupy as a *son of the palace.* "My Father's House!" What is this, Oh Christians, but

your Father's House—the House of the Father of your elder Brother?

Men sometimes occupy a mansion as servants. Sometimes they hold it as tenants at will. And sometimes they are visitors, perhaps favored visitors, staying long and fareing nobly, but still mere sojourners looking forward to the time when they shall leave the place in which they have no interest of ownership. It is in no such character that our friends who sleep in Jesus, inhabit the spacious palace of heaven. They are its sons and daughters. Its fee is in them. They live there as having permanent rights and privileges in the edifice and in the best it affords—as being on terms of filial intimacy and confidence with the Head of the House. Could you have a glimpse of them for a moment, you would see them to be at home in the largest sense. Their entire condition takes a trumpet and proclaims, "All things are yours."

Now if the future place of the believer were some narrow and provincial home like this world, to have filial rights in it would not mean so very much: but since it is God's own Metropolitan Palace filled with the rarest and most varied treasures, sonship then means one of the most glorious things possible. To have rights of filial intimacy and freedom with the owner of some earthly mansion would not be much of a privilege: but what words can express the honor and privilege of having such rights with the Most High! A man congratulates himself when he has acquired the freedom of a great city—especially when he actually comes to it, and sails in its ships, and rides in its chariots, and feasts in its halls, and paces along the Boulevards of its warehouses, from any one of which he can

take what he pleases for nothing. What a noble thing to have the freedom, after the manner of a child, of such a City as God—the freedom of his infinite goodness, of his infinite power, of his infinite wisdom! Our dead Christian friends walking along the great colonnades and beneath the dim wondrous arches of such a cathedral Being as this, conscious of a filial ownership in God and of power to draw upon his greatness to any extent—why should they not rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory!

We come now to consider the Relations which Christ sustains to this Celestial Home of the believer. It will be found that these relations add to it still further features of brightness, as well as give new lessons belonging to the unity of our subject.

A Revealer. Who is this telling us of the many-mansioned Father's House? Christ. And when he proceeds to add, "If it were not so I would have told you," the fair inference is that he carries his revealing to the point of not allowing his disciples to remain in any important error or ignorance in regard to their position in the next world. Nature tells us with clearness absolutely nothing about heaven. She does not even inform us that there is a place of happiness for good men after death. Ah, poor Socrates, Plato, heathen philosophers all! How the mistress you served starved your hungry souls with the husks of guesses in place of the pure wheat of satisfying knowledge! But whom did she ever treat better? Even the Old Testament gives us but a mere crust on this subject. But Christ comes and lo, a feast is spread—lo, life and immortality brought to light! He tells us plainly of the spacious Home, of the Home in the immediate presence

of God, of the Home occupied as sons:—while in other parts of Scripture he largely fills out this outline picture, sometimes with the heavy lines of literal statement, and sometimes with the vague mezzotint of figure, as in the Apocalypse. And he makes the picture as complete as it is well for us to have it. So he is our Photographing Light, painting to us in all weathers on paper of Scripture, the Father's House of many Mansions. He is our Delectable Mountains and telescope by which, through all skies, we can see in the distance the Celestial City.

A most pleasant feature of this Home of the believer is, that it is not to us, even in this world, a concealed Home: but that, in our struggles and sorrows and temptations, we are able to see its bright shining from afar to attract to repentance, to encourage our christian zeal, to comfort our many sorrows, to make us less reluctant to part with pious friends called by death, to make us less reluctant to go ourselves on the inevitable journey. And the fact that it is Christ to whom has fallen the office of revealing, is our assurance that the office is most wisely performed—that there is no mistake made as to facts; no undue coloring of them so as at last to bring us disappointment; no excessive or deficient disclosure, so that we see as much of the Home, and only as much, as it is well for us to see.

A Preparer. "I go to prepare a place for you." So it seems that Christ is something more than a revealer of others' work: what he manifests is the work of his own hands. Himself builds and furnishes the Home of which he tells us. By his death he procures for believers the right of admission to heaven, by his intercessions he preserves them in that right during

their life of weakness and sin, by his wisdom he selects for each the sphere in the heavenly society which is fitted to his particular nature and makes it ready for him against his coming. It may be years before that coming will be called for. But even now the alabaster palace is rising which you are to occupy; and every time you perform a right act or think a good thought, a new stone of beauty is laid in foundation or wall or turret. Methinks I see now, growing from day to day under his skillful hands, the white robes you are to wear, white as no fuller on earth could white them—see, growing too, that jeweled crown of yours whose single glory could light up our whole earth. Is it not an inspiring thought that while, on this side of the veil, you are walking in darkness and straitness and humiliation, just on the other side of it, are going forward such royal preparations in your behalf: and that at the very time our Christian friends were, to the great pity of all who saw them, painfully wasting away into the grave, the last stone was being laid with shouting on their mansion up in yonder glorious azure, and the long growing pomp of harps and crowns was receiving from the loving skill of Christ the last touches of its glory!

But Christ not only prepares the Home for the believer but also the believer for his Home. Why did the Master say, "I go to prepare a place for you?" Was it not to do upon the disciples a certain moral work whose last look was towards the boundless next state, whither, indeed, all the lines of God's dealings with men converge? As the believer is at first, there is no correspondency between him and such a princely dwelling as has been described. The character must be brought to suit the proposed position. The prince, that is to be, must be shaped into a princely nature by

a princely education. And so Christ takes upon him a two-fold work. With one hand he makes ready the mansion in the skies; with the other he makes ready the character on earth to match it. He builds just as fast on the terrestrial structure as he does on the celestial. For every stroke that sounds away among the stars there is an answering stroke deep within the heart. He is exalted to give repentance, he sheds forth Pentecosts, he is made to us righteousness and sanctification —in a word we are complete in him. How fair to think that, in this way, we are being gradually so adjusted to the Home that at last there will not be a single point of friction between us: every thing of the outward delicately fitting every characteristic of the inward, as in the exquisite jointings of some perfect and noiseless machinery. For the fact that Christ, the almighty and allwise, is making the adjustments is proof that they will be perfectly made, and that when the believer reaches heaven he will find it thoroughly his own place.

An Introducer. "And if I go and prepare a place for you I will come again and receive you to myself." At the judgment day Jesus will come and overtly escort each believer, soul and body, with mighty pomp and rejoicing to take formal possession of his new Home. But, long before that time, the soul will have an invisible introduction to its rest under the same auspices. "Lord Jesus," said dying Stephen, "receive my spirit." And it seems to me that the part of the text just recited points rather to such a reception than to that distant one at the end of the world. It is the first personal contact with Christ after the ascension which is referred to. This we are elsewhere informed takes place in

close connection with death. Thus Paul counted absence from the body to be presence with the Lord; and the dying thief was promised that he should be in Paradise with Christ on the self same day. So, to the disciple, death is merely the coming of Christ to take him Home. To the sense-eye, indeed, it is a sad scene that is passing when your friend lies panting away his breath. Pallor and wasting and suffering: and around that bed tears are flowing and hearts are breaking. But is this all? Could your eyes be touched as were those of Elisha's servant, you would see glorious sights in that stricken chamber. Lo, the chariots of Israel and the horsemen thereof—bright angels, such as carried Lazarus to Abraham's bosom, sent by Christ to be his representatives—perhaps Christ himself in his own proper person! Every object around is aglow with reflected beauty, and the starry plumage of cherub and seraph is fanning and rustling and perfuming in that fevered air. And yet our dull senses perceive nothing but the valley of the shadow of death. But look! Is not the dying man seeing more? What means that earnest gaze upward, that sweet peace settling into the features as the last breath is drawn! Surely he has at last caught blissful sight of the Saviour come to redeem his promise and receive him to himself! And now, a full-fledged angel, he is mounting upward, upward, under the lead of that royal escort into the finished mansion of the Father's House. What a glorious introduction to the Home is this! Oh call it not death—call it life, most enviable and wondrous life, life as to time and manner as well as matter; for the fact that it is ministered by Christ proves it a perfect event in all these respects. It is not a moment too soon or too late, not a pang too painful or too easy, not a ray too daz-

zling or too dim—bear witness the mingled greatness and goodness of the Redeemer!

A Co-occupant. "That where I am there ye may be also." Christ does not establish his people in the Home and then leave them. Were he to do so, no small part of its brightness would depart with him. What would heaven be, without a Christ in it, to such a man as Paul—with his burning soul counting all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus the Lord? After death every believer of us is to be a Paul and more. And so if, when once the soul is fairly settled in its prepared place, the Saviour should say adieu and spread departing wings, that golden palace, though shining like ten thousand suns, would at once seem plunged in sore eclipse. But such calamity shall not happen. The introducing Saviour shall be the co-inhabiting Saviour. Dying in the faith we shall not only go Home but go to be forever with the Lord. He has willed and prayed that those who have been given him may be with him and behold his glory—has engaged that where he is, there shall also his servants be. Our Home shall be his. And think what it is to have such a companion. Can there be companionship more high and pure and instructive and gentle and loving?

In view of this entire subject, the future Home of the believer and the Relations which Christ sustains to it, I offer the following remarks.

How desirable the lot of the Christian—whether living, dying or dead! Most persons freely concede that his future is most enviable; but it is not apt to be so well noticed that his position throughout is one of

wonderful beauty and sublimity. Yet so it is. His life is a revelation and preparation, his death an introduction, and his eternity an occupancy as a son, in respect to a vast and glorious palace in the immediate presence of God. While plodding daily among earth's common things—plying his trade, tilling his land, drawing his net—just beneath the horizon those princely halls are preparing for him. The mountain tops are already red with the light of the rising structure; and some of its rays are reflected into even the lowest vallies. Every day his heart is being silently expanded, shaped, adorned by a Divine Workman to fit the grandeur of the completed Home. What a sublime thing is the life that has such relations, even though it lies along the world's obscurest vale!—And the death of the believer is even more sublime: for it is the actual introduction by the sublimest of agencies into the Father's House. A Shining One comes down to the hither bank of the river, and hovers about him all the way over: and as soon as his foot touches the shore, up they spring in company, like pillars of fire, into the flashing Home with its open welcoming gates.—And the future, the boundless future after death, spent in joint occupancy of such a dwelling, why, this is the sublimest thing of all, the overwhelming end of what is not a little amazing in beginning and progress. If there is any spark of generous ambition in our bosoms, let it now kindle into leaping flame. If there is any grain of gratitude within us, let it now become tree-like toward him who has made such a lot actual to some of us and possible to all. If any of us have friends who, after having ascended to the sublime life of the christian, have gone on to his sublimer death, and now at last have stepped out upon the sublimest platform of all—almost out of sight,

and far above all clouds and storms and sins—the eternal life with Christ in the Father's House, oh, instead of pursuing them with tearful eyes and reclaiming words, let us rejoice with them in their exceeding joy over the grand climax they have accomplished, and the deepening of their dawn into the day that never sets! And if any of you are yet without hold on such a life, death, and eternity, is it not high time to awake out of sleep as you stand by this open grave, and are thus reminded that your own is being dug—and what after but an impossible heaven! O dying men, spending your lives in laboriously doing nothing, let me commend to your fervent ambition and instant seeking, the sublime lot of the Christian, whether living, dying or dead.

The next best thing to having this lot, is to know that you have it, especially in a dying hour. It frequently happens, no doubt, that true Christians have no satisfying persuasion that they are such, and even go all their lives long sorely trembling lest it shall prove at last that the root of the matter is not in them. This is a great calamity. There is only one greater, and that is the having no Christian character to see. To be without that great fuel in our love, attractiveness in our example, spring in our labor, ease in our care, freedom in our bondage, light in our darkness, life in our death, legacy of unfailing comfort to survivors in our entombment, that is involved in a clearly-read title to mansions in the skies—what believer of us does not devoutly say "Lord, let it not be, Amen and Amen." Especially do we want to have our calling and election made sure to our convictions amid the gathering shadows of the grave, both for our own sake and for the sake of those friends we leave behind. It is our

privilege, sometimes, to see the Christian depart in such full expectation of being clothed upon with the house that is from heaven, that half the bitterness of the loss is taken away from the household: and as they carry forth their dead to burial, and ever after, as often as the memory of that loss recurs, there comes to them with it the unspeakable consolation of remembering the last cheerful words and dying smile which seemed to greet a heaven in full view. Who of us does not wish to bequeath such comfort? Who of us does not wish, for his own sake, to feel in the last hours of life that it is no mere guess of safety he has to sustain him, but true knowledge—that a place above has long been preparing for him and he for it, that now he is just on the eve of being introduced to it, and that the very act of breathing forth his last breath a few days hence, will be the act of crossing the threshold of the ready palace, in which he is to dwell forever with Christ as an elder brother? Do you doubt whether this blessing is possible to you? Make trial. Do it by holy living—do it for your own sake—do it for the sake of the dear friends who will be gathered, as we are this day, to lay the body in the house appointed for all the living, and who will be comforted to think that your soul went forth in assurance of a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.

See further that neither the one nor the other, neither the possession of the Christian lot, nor an assurance of the possession, can be had without Jesus Christ. He is the Alpha and Omega in this whole matter of the House of Many Mansions. He is the true victory of life and of death and of eternity—all three. If you ever have a home in heaven going up for you, you must, in some way, secure the services of Christ the

only builder of such homes. If ever you have death rebaptised and regenerated for you, from "King of Terrors" and "Last Enemy" into "Usher of the Father's House," you must, in some way, secure Christ to come and receive you to himself. If ever you occupy that House in joy, you must be content to occupy it not only by Christ but with him; nay, must learn to have joy in his person and society. And if, the sublime lot of the Christian being yours, you ever come to a happy assurance of the fact, and die as "sweetly shuts the eye of day," it must be by virtue of his witnessing, whom, in the text, we find performing that office for the Apostles: who are there told by Christ, many years in advance, that at death they will surely find a place prepared for them, and himself standing ready to conduct them thither. Blessed be Thou, O Way and Truth and Life—O Revealer and Preparer and Introducer and Companion—O Architect of life, King of death, and Glory of the everlasting—blessed be thou that poor dying men, destined soon to be hearsed and entombed as one of us is this day, can obtain thy matchless services in their behalf on such simple and easy terms as repenting and believing; and thy help to repent and believe by the mere nothing of honest asking for it! That you may meet these terms, my friends, and so live and die under the wing of Christ, and then live again with him in the House of Many Mansions, is my earnest prayer, and, with sustaining grace of God, shall be my earnest endeavor to the end of my ministry among you.

Triumph of Religion.

OBITUARY NOTICE.

THE following notice of her death appeared in the "Christian Secretary" and "Religious Herald," of Hartford, written by her former pastor and intimate friend, and in whose family she spent several months during her sickness.

MRS. LUCRETIA M. PARKER, wife of JOHN M. PARKER, Esq., died at Hamburg, Conn., Nov. 4, 1859. That fatal disease, consumption, wasted her strength gradually, and for some three years she was a great sufferer, which she bore in the most patient and submissive manner, evidencing in all her sickness, implicit trust in the mercy and grace of God.

Of her piety it may be said, it was deep, uniform, and consistent, affording her great comfort in all her sickness, and enabling her to triumph in the hour of death, and thus leave to her weeping husband, children and other friends, the fullest assurance that for her to die was gain; with her last words commending them to God as able to comfort, and support them amidst the trials of parting; assuring them that if faithful to the grace given, they should have a blessed re-union in heaven,—and then triumphantly passed to her eternal rest.

Sister PARKER was the child of pious parents, and early trained in the fear of the Lord. She experienced religion about fifteen years ago.

In her natural disposition, she was modest and amiable. In her family and in her profession, she was an example worthy of imitation. Nature and grace, both had done much for her.

Her death has made a sad breach in a large circle of friends, and left her husband and two lovely daughters to mourn a loss, which can never be made up to them in this world of sorrow and death. But though she now sleeps in the silent grave, yet we can not doubt that her example and prayers, will not only afford comfort and hope to her afflicted and bereaved husband, whose happiness, enjoyment and usefulness as a Christian, were objects that lay near her heart; but also, upon the future and eternal welfare of those lovely little daughters, over whom she shed so many tears, and with and for whom she so often bowed in prayer in her secret chamber. For of them it may be said in the most emphatic manner, they are children of many prayers and much counsel. Their mother, feeling that she must leave them, has spared no pains, in trying to do all in her power to train their infant minds to love and serve the Lord.

Such indeed has been their early training, that the recollection of a fond mother, must ever connect with it the recollection of her instructions and prayers. And these point to that Saviour whose smile afforded her so much comfort in life, and whose grace enabled her to rejoice in death, as the way through which they may hope to meet her in heaven.

In her triumphant death, we think the consolations of religion and the presence of the Spirit shown in no ordinary manner. It was not an easy matter for her to break the strong and tender ties that bound her to her husband and daughters. O, no, it was done only by prayer and many tears. She told a dear friend, not long since, that the world looked *beautiful* to her,—beautiful to her! yes, very beautiful,—"but I have given it all up;" and as her bodily strength failed, and as she neared the end of life, her spiritual strength increased. Religion triumphed, and she was sustained by the ever blessed Spirit until the end, enabling her as it did, to bid her weeping husband, children, parents, brothers and sister, *farewell*, calmly,—exhibiting no more emotion than if she were bidding them farewell for a day,—exhorting the unconverted to seek religion and then live it,—and all, to meet her in heaven. Thus, with a smile upon her lips, saying she was "going home," she passed from earth away.

Of our departed sister Parker, most confidently may we say in

the language of Revelation, "Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labors; and their works do follow them."